

January 17, 2008 Fire Steering Meeting Minutes

Attendees:, Paul Rumelhart, Kootenai River Development; Ed Levert, Lincoln County Forester; Marc McGill, Lincoln County DES; Janette Turk, Fire Prevention Tech., USFS; John Shotzberger, Libby Area Manager, DNRC; Sandra Lind, Lincoln County Environmental Health; Sue Sutherland, Manager, Northwest RC&D.

Round Robin-

Shotzberger- Flower Creek Sale will probably be sold in June. 3.5 MMBF is the estimated volume. There will be no burning on the sale and there appears to be interest in grinding the material. Jerry Okanski is opening a pulp yard at the old Champion site today. He will be taking material down to 2 ½" and 12' length. He hopes to be able to take 8' pieces so pickup loads could come in too.

McGill- Pleased with the poster that Janette and team came up with on such short order. 2750 have been printed. Working with others and with law enforcement on how best to enforce fire restrictions in the county and state.

The Northern Tier Project has elevated the Pinkam communication site from totally excluded to #1 or #2. The project should be completed this summer and this will complete the new communication system funded by Homeland Security and linking county, state and federal agencies

County rural fire departments recently received a grant from the DNRC in the following amounts: Fisher River RFD received \$51,570(included new turnouts), Trego/Fortine/Stryker \$75,000(fire trucks), West Kootenai \$16,814(lap top computer and training software that can be used county wide).

Lind- Wood stove program appears to be going well. Working at educating stove owners on proper burning techniques. Still not meeting attainment goals, but feels the problem is coming from the west, primarily Idaho.

Turk- Worked with Keith on posters. Accompanied Keith to several rural fire departments. Chair of the Northwest Zone of the fire prevention committee of the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group. Working with Marc and other agencies to come up with a more definitive authority when citing for fire violations such as illegal campfires. Has developed a media plan which she is hopeful the committee will adopt.

Fire Safe Montana will be having another workshop in Bozeman on February 25, 26 and 27.

Kootenai Forest FMO's are having a workload problem in issuing burn permits. Janette believes site visits and talking with the permit holders necessary. Marc said that district fire chiefs have the authority to write exemptions for burning and that has sometime been a problem. She said that in Flathead County you can get your burn permit on their county web site.

Rumelhart- Smurfit Stone has leased the site at Champion for receiving pulp. Jerry Okanski will be operating the site. Paul discussed the goal of having 6,000 acres of restoration projects on the Kootenai which should work out to 29 tons per acre(TPA) of sawlogs and 12 TPA of pulp. Jerry will be paying \$34 a ton for delivered pulp. Smurfit will be able to reconfigure pulp loads to Frenchtown to increase a load to 35-40 tons per load. Paul says this whole effort is tied to the biomass grant proposal he has submitted to the Forest Service that includes a new scales and equipment for Lucky EG post and pole. John S. said he expects 350-400 loads of pulp to come off of the Flower Creek Sale.

Paul expressed the need to better illustrate the tangible benefits of not burning vs. burning for the re-write of the Forest Service grant that Kootenai Rive Development submitted. John S. explained that if you plan on the utilization of non-sawlog material, prior to logging, you can show a benefit. He will write up a short explanation and send to Paul.

Sutherland- 2004 grant surplus, that must be spent by June of 2008, is now obligated and it appears the funds will be spent rather than having to turn back. Will receive \$100,000 in 2008 for Stevens Bill projects. \$50,000 each for

Flathead and Lincoln Counties. 2008 Western States Grant proposal is 6th or 7th rated in state. Still waiting for the federal budget to come out on that one.

NW RC&D is revamping their organization somewhat. Jennifer Nelson is taking over responsibility for the fire grant in Lincoln County. The Troy Fuels for Schools heating system has some glitches and the ribbon cutting ceremony has been postponed. The Eureka heating system is working well.

Levert- The Kootenai Stakeholder Coalition will be sponsoring an educational presentation on March 12. Russ Graham and Terri Jain from the the Rocky Mountain Experiment Station in Moscow ID will be talking about fire severity and burn effects in the WUI and landscape. The presentation will be at the Memorial Center at 7PM and will be open to the public.

I handed out a brochure that I picked up from Show Low Arizona instructing residents about what to do if there is a wildfire. The group all thought this could be easily applied to our local area. Janette will work over the brochure and have for our next meeting.

New Business- Response to request for issues and recommendations by the Montana Fire Suppression Interim Committee that will reduce the cost of wildfire suppression. **See Addendum**

Next Meeting- February 19, 2008

The meeting adjourned at 12:00

Ed Levert, Chair

Addendum to Lincoln County Fire Steering Committee Meeting on January 17, 2008

New Business- Our committee did a “brain storming” exercise to come up with issues and some possible solutions that address the Montana Fire Suppression Interim Committee recent request. This request sought ideas that might reduce the cost of wildfire suppression. The issues and recommendations are a shot gun approach at best, which the review committee can hopefully review and draw their own conclusions. The political issue of zoning and legislation will make implementation of some of these recommendations extremely difficult if not impossible.

- 1) Issue-Rural fire departments are having a difficult time recruiting and retaining volunteer fire fighters.
- 2) Issue-Rural fire departments have an inadequate budget to maintain effectiveness.
- 3) Issue-Mandated training and contracting requirements have resulted in inflexibility at all levels of fire suppression.
- 4) Issue-Rural fire departments need to be able to address the needs of growth through impact and mitigation fees.
- 5) Issue-Incident Management Teams are losing personnel and qualified individuals are hesitant to join teams because of the risk of personal litigation.
- 6) Issue-Incident Management Teams are often from other parts of the country and lack the local “color” needed to make them more effective. I.e. Southeast teams unfamiliar with mountainous terrain.
- Issue-Sub-divisions are being approved without adequate consideration for wildfire risk including water supply and ingress and egress. **Recommendation-**Require “firewise” assessment of the proposed sub-division at the time of the application and make the recommendation from the assessment a requirement for approval. I.e. Lincoln County currently doing this.
- 8) Issue-Many homes and sub-divisions in the WUI are being located in very hazardous locations. Locations such as in draws or steep slopes where the risk to the homeowner and firefighter is extreme. **Recommendation-**A possible solution would be to just not allow development in these areas.
- 9) Issue-Landowners who have reduced their fire hazard should be exempt from expenses and liabilities occurred from fire suppression. **Recommendation-**Consider enactment of the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act or something similar.
- 10) Issue- We still have too many man cause fires started from slash burning. **Recommendation-**Grants made available to subsidize below-cost removal of pulp and bio-mass.
- 11) Issue- Incident Management Teams may not be available in critical areas. **Recommendation-**Pre-position teams to critical areas.
- 12) Issue- The public may or may not understand the risk of wildfire. **Recommendation-**Continue and intensify fire prevention efforts.
- Issue- Federal lands are often a fire hazard and a threat to residents in the WUI. **Recommendation-**Encourage more land management in regard to fuels, biomass and forest health.
- 14) Issue- Large, long term stewardship contracts like currently in place on the Apache-Sitgreaves N.F. in Arizona are not being encouraged in Montana primarily because of the lack of leadership and the bonding requirements

required by the Federal Acquisitions Act. **Recommendation**-Encourage land managers to take more risk and implement long term stewardship contracts when economics allow. Also encourage federal legislation that reduces or eliminates the cancellation bond currently required for these contracts.

- 15) Issue- Roads are being obliterated and closed on federal lands making fire suppression more difficult and expensive. **Recommendation**-Consider fire access and response time when making the decision to close or obliterate a road.
- 16) Issue- Roads that are currently seasonally closed on federal lands are often impassible to firefighters because of the lack of maintenance. **Recommendation**-If a road is going to remain on the transportation system it should be made accessible to fire fighters.
- 17) Issue- Severity funds for fire fighting are not always adequate for state or federal agencies. **Recommendation**-Maintain and increase severity funds.
- 18) Issue- There is not always a consistent policy between and within agencies in regard to fire suppression. One agency may attempt to save all homes in danger of a wildfire regardless of a lack of an effort by homeowners to "firewise" the property. Other agencies may not. **Recommendation**-Agree to a consistent policy recognizing that available resources and time constraints may vary by fire.
- 19) Issue- We still have an extremely hazardous condition with existing homes that are not "firewise" plus the many more that are being constructed in the WUI. **Recommendation**-a. Increase funding for educational efforts and grants that create defensible space, b. encourage insurance companies to carefully consider existing "firewise" conditions before insuring. A harder line position would be to deny insurance through state law for those properties that are a fire risk to themselves and their neighbors.
- 20) Issue- Building codes vary for residences outside municipalities. Many materials are recognized as being fire resistant while others are not. **Recommendation**-Require building codes that promote fire resistant materials.

Heisel, Leanne

From: john bennett [bwtf@outgun.com]
Sent: Friday, January 18, 2008 2:25 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne; timmurphy@fs.fed.us; dave@bushfireservice.com
Subject: Fire Suppression Committee

To: Leanne Heisel
Fire Suppression Committee
From: John J. Bennett, owner
Black Wolf Task Force
Simms, Montana
Re: Fire Suppression Committee comments

Madam:

The following comments are submitted in response to your request for input from fire suppression contracotrs:

I have repeatedly heard comments from my fellow engine and tender operators concerning the use of EERA resources on fire suppression operations. It is recognized that the EERA resources will always be an alternative available to fire suppression administrators. This provides them with a source for fire suppression resources upon exhaustion of those available by contract.

It must also be a concern that these resources provide them with equipment and personnel that meet standards in place for both equipment and staffing.

We in the contract engine and tender business have two areas of concern with the EERA resources:

The first is the continued use of EERA resources on fires while contract resources are being sent away. This is a direct violation of the agencies' obligation for the employment of contract engines.

I believe this to be occuring primarily because once an EERA resource is on the incident, fire personnel have no way to easily and definitively identify a resource as EERA . These resources need to be readily recognizable to incident personnel so they can be managed in accordance with their agreements.

I believe there should be a prominent entry in a piece of EERA equipment's resource order that identifies them as such. This should be apparent in the agreement number; evidently it is not.

Plans and Finance personnel need to be trained to spot this entry upon the equipment's check-in at an incident and made aware of the limitations this type contract places on its employment. Further, the equipment should be identified in t-card files and documentation so Plans and resource management personnel would be aware that they should be among the first units to be de-mobed.

Another area of concern is the crewing and equipment complement of EERA engines. It is

1/18/2008

patently unfair to those of us who equip and maintain our engines in accordance with Chapter 20 and Region One contract specifications as well as to the fire management personnel on an incident to allow EERA equipment on the line that does not meet the same standards for complement and condition as do contract engines.

The equipment complements and standards under which we operate have supposedly been formulated to provide fire management personnel equipment on an incident that meets the requirements of the resource manager in a safe, effective, standardized manner. So have the inspection standards. They should apply uniformly to all.

As well, the crews of EERA engines and tenders should have to meet the same standards for training, condition and equipment as required of the contracted engines' crew persons, including the crew complement. It is my understanding that in the 2007 season Type Six EERA engines only required a crew of two people while the contract engines required a crew of three people. If so, this allowed the agencies to violate their own standards.

I submit that these requirements for equipment standards and especially for crew make-up are not only a matter of fairness; they are a matter of safety. The fire manager must be able to depend upon the quality of the resources we provide him regardless of their source. And he must be able to assume all resources of a type are similar in make-up and quality.

Both the agencies and the contractors have worked long and hard to professionalize the contract resource. We have come a long way in accomplishing that. It is more than a little disheartening to see it compromised by the agencies with whom we cooperate.

Concerning topic three on your letter addressing private land-owner resources: we have to make the land owners aware they must take a hand in preparing pre-fire to address issues that may arise that affect their holdings. They must be aware that we simply do not have the capability to do it all, and once the fire is encroaching on their property it is too late to try. We need to develop something similar to FireWise for the farmers and ranchers to get them to prepare in advance for the protection of their resources. It could be as simple as clearing the thirty year growth of sagebrush from the perimeter of their huge haystack before the fire is on the property boundary. They could plow in a firebreak around valuable equipment yards and resources; maybe set up their own sprinkler systems or at least spot portable water tanks in advance of an incident. There are numerous actions they can take to help themselves in advance of a fire event. We need to make them aware of the options, and maybe even help them out where we can.

Yours,
John J. Bennett, owner
Black Wolf Task Force



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Heisel, Leanne

From: Dave Price [dprice@neofast.net]
Sent: Monday, January 21, 2008 2:59 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Suppression Committee Input

The Management of our Forest Lands is Broken. Land managers are Hampered by endless Laws, Regulations, and self imposed Policies. This situation has been created by Law Makers, The Legal System, and Misguided Environmentalist's, that have essentially eliminated responsible Forest Management Practices.

Now our Forest Lands are massive Tender boxes of decadent Forests that are the result of a "do nothing management strategy". For the Present situation very little can be done to prevent further Forest Fires like the ones experienced in recent years, it is too late. We can, however, make changes which will result in a more manageable and stable Forest situation in the future.

We must start by managing our Forest Lands. Change Laws, Regulations, and policies that have Gotten us to where we now find ourselves, and allow Responsible Forest Management to become a reality again, and move us toward a more healthy and viable Forest Eco system, and away from the mass destruction Forest management we now experience.

There is a segment of our Forest Lands that are more restricted than others. That is Wilderness. Vast areas of our Forest resources are under this allocation, and is therefore a significant part of this issue. What is needed here is a review of wilderness Management plans and policies. Changes in Fire Strategies need to be made. "Let It Burn" policies may have been acceptable in the past when conditions produced less catastrophic results, But today's Forest condition does not lend itself to such a management strategy and produces large areas of significant detrimental resource impacts to our wilderness areas. We should not be considering adding candidate areas to the Wilderness system until we have first figured out how to manage those Wilderness areas we already have.

MIRAN

MONTANA • RIVER • ACTION • NETWORK

Fire Suppression Comm.

Jan 23, 2008

DEAR Leanne,

Through County or State Zoning,

We must stop building structures in wild fire prone areas.

The selfish wants of both native Montanans and out of state movers and private land owners greedily accommodating these wants must be stopped, by law.

The desire to live within wild lands is expensive and not sustainable.

I am in my 80's. WWII veteran.

Served 13 years in the smokejumpers starting in the latter 1940's.

Have fought fire all over the Western States.

And know where - as I speak.

Sincerely,

Joe Guttenki Pres MRA



Northwest Management, Inc.

Natural Resource Management

P.O. Box 565
Helena, MT 59624
(406) 442-7555
nwmanage@montana.com
www.consulting-foresters.com

January 21, 2008

Montana Interim Fire Suppression Committee
c/o Leanne Heisel
Box 201706
Helena MT 59620

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the critically important work your group has undertaken in regards to fire suppression and wildfire hazard mitigation in Montana. This letter is intended to address the issue of the role conservation easements play in regards to wildfire hazard mitigation efforts in Montana.

Northwest Management, Inc. (NMI) is a natural resource consulting company which operates an office in Helena, MT. The office has 3 full time professional foresters on staff and provides forest management services to forest landowners across the State of Montana. Our clients are predominately private individuals and families who own forested property. We also provide services to the forest industry, as well as local, state and federal government organizations. Services provided include timber sale management, wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation, forest management planning, forest inventory work, range management, and wildfire suppression.

NMI has had the opportunity to work with numerous forested ownerships which have conservation easements in place with various land trust organizations. As a result we have worked in coordination with the following land trust organizations; The Montana Land Reliance, The Gallatin Valley Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy and The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. We have implemented commercial timber harvests and wildfire hazard reduction projects on numerous ownerships that have conservation easements in place with the land trusts listed above. Over the past 4-5 years we have assisted landowners, who have conservation easements on their property, with the harvest of approximately 4 million board feet of timber. This timber was harvested by Montana based logging contractors and sold to Montana based wood product manufacturers. Wildfire hazard reduction was a common objective for each of the landowners who completed a timber harvest. Other activities completed on these and other ownerships have included development of forest management plans and non-commercial wildfire hazard mitigation reduction projects near residences, outbuilding, and roads.

Each of the various land trust organizations we coordinated with on these projects supported the efforts of landowners to implement planned wildfire hazard mitigation projects. Typically the only requirement from a land trust organization is the

development of a Timber Harvest Plan or a Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Plan. In fact we have worked with only 2 ownerships that had conservation easement restrictions that prohibited commercial timber harvesting. In each case the land trust organization, through their board of directors, passed resolutions permitting the timber harvest to proceed upon submission and approval of a professionally prepared Timber Harvest Plan. The Timber Harvest Plan documented forest health problems or wildfire risks associated with the existing forest condition that warranted forest management action.

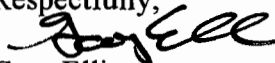
Individual landowners who have conservation easements in place on their property are typically motivated to utilize natural resource professional to plan and implement forest management projects. Most landowners are keenly aware of the wildfire hazards that exist on their property and are motivated to take appropriate action. These landowners appreciate the fact that management of their forest lands provides benefits to both the ecological condition of their property and to the local economies which benefit when timber is harvested and manufactured into wood products.

Our experience is that the various land trusts in Montana are supportive of appropriate forest management including wildfire hazard reduction that involves commercial timber harvesting. The presence of a conservation easement on a property has not restricted our ability to design and implement wildfire hazard mitigation projects. In fact, our business derives a significant portion of its annual income designing and implementing wildfire hazard reduction projects on properties with conservation easements. The current process is rational and cost efficient to the landowner. The professional input required from natural resources professionals improves the quality of forest management and ensures that projects are well planned and accomplish the stated objectives.

The land trust organizations we have worked with are supportive in regards to management of Montana's forest resources. There has been a perception among some citizens and elected officials that the opposite is true. Specifically, our experience has indicated that wildfire hazard reduction does occur on properties with conservation easements and that land trust organizations support proactive forest management.

Thank you for your efforts in addressing the critically important issues associated with wildfire suppression and mitigation in the great State of Montana.

Respectfully,



Gary Ellingson,
Montana Area Manager
Northwest Management, Inc.
P.O. Box 565
Helena, MT 59624
Ph: 406-442-7555
Email: nwmanage@montana.com

Allen Schallenger
53 Elser Lane
Sheridan, MT 59749-9604
406-842-5134
Jan. 24, 2008

Senator John Cobb Chair
Fire Suppression Committee
c/o Leanne Heisel
Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Senator Cobb:

The following are some points I think need to be studied by the legislature in regard to management of forested lands:

1. Legislators and others need to be aware of the 10,000 year history of American Indian management of grasslands and forests with fires in our state. Excellent references have been put together by Gerald W. Williams, Ph. D. Historical Analyst USDA Forest Service, Washington, D. C. in 2001. Included are 300 citations and 43 pages. Fire histories and frequency of burning data have put out by Dr. Henry T. Lewis, retired Prof. at University of Alberta who has written more books and reports than anyone else. Other very good authors on fire history are Stephen Pyne, Stephan Barrett and Steve Arno.
2. Restoration forestry is needed to prevent the large catastrophic fires we have been having. Dr. Thomas Bonnicksen, retired Prof. of forestry at Texas A and M put out a 50 page CD in 2007 titled Protecting Communities and Saving Forests. It would be a very good start for the committee to review this video on restoration forestry. While his pictures are from California it is applicable in Montana. It is available free from local libraries. He also wrote the outstanding book America's Forests from Ice Age to Discovery, 2000, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 594pp. It documents the 18,000 year history of our forests.
3. We are in a huge mess because the USFS has forgotten its founding mission to produce lumber and other wood products and water from our forests. Investigate the decline in forestry work in our forests and what has caused it.
 - a. Learn the huge economic impacts their management has caused for Montana.
 - b. Study how environmental groups stop desirable forest projects and also profit from their lawsuits.
4. Currently the USFS seems to believe that its mission is to burn down forests with catastrophic fires (WFO) whoofoos to some. Forty to 50 per cent of their budget is going to ineffective fire fighting. See SOS Forests .com for a great deal of information

on this subject. You and I are both very familiar with what happened on the Ahorn, Fool Creek and Badger-Two Medicine fires this year. I worked in those areas on wildlife research and management from 1963 through 1979.

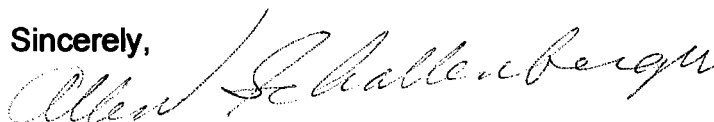
5. Check out the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute at the University of Montana. Missoula funded by the USFS and other federal agencies to the tune of about 1.5 million per year. Carol Miller recently won a USFS National Award on her work of getting catastrophic fires into our wilderness areas. She mentioned that she thought it would help the lynx. There are other cats that need help, and foremost are the citizens of Montana who need protection from these poor policies hatched at the Institute.

6. In Southwest Montana we have overgrown and dead and dying forests. It is nearly impossible to get a post and pole cutting permit and many roads are closed to wood cutting even. We have lost our lumber mills, post and pole plants and our forests are burning up or will burn from bug kills in the near future. I recently attended a field trip on the Big Hole River and ranchers there whose families have lived there successfully for over 100 years can no longer cut posts and poles on the National Forest. Instead they must truck them in from west of the Continental Divide. Local post dealers in Dillon, MT home of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest headquarters are mostly selling posts from Canada. Currently the USFS and radical groups want to lock up many of our mountain ranges in wilderness and not manage them.

7. I started the Jefferson River Watershed Council and served on it for seven years. We are losing our water supplies from our headwaters streams due to greatly increased density of conifer trees. They suck up and transpire lots of water and also intercept much of the snow pack and sublimate it from the branches before it ever reaches the ground. Many trees are dead and dying due to the lack of water. Also the conifers have out-competed and replaced the aspen and willows which would normally line the creeks and produce beaver food and dam building materials. The beavers used to store lots of water in the riparian soils next to and below the dams which fed the streams during the summer. That no longer is happening in many cases. Also wet riparian areas are good barriers to fires. With the poor streamside logging laws we have in Montana conifers are taking over and creating dead material firetraps which will boil the water in hot fires.

Senator Cobb, I am a 5th generation native of Montana and have worked on the Black Hills, Custer, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Flathead, Helena, Lolo and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests since 1961 as a wildlife research and management biologist, cattle rancher, and general outfitter. I am currently retiring from outfitting and have both wildlife consulting and gift products manufacturing businesses. Thanks for the comment opportunity.

Sincerely,



Allen Schallenberger

Heisel, Leanne

From: Joe and Karen [joekar@blackfoot.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 24, 2008 4:12 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: fire suppression suggestions

After reading the article regarding fire suppression and the possibility of new policies being implemented, I'd like to make a suggestion.

A large portion of the fires that happen in this state seem to be man made, and whether accidental or arson, they were preventable. It may slow down this percentage of preventable fires if the investigating team would update the public on reasons for fire, cost of fire suppression, and what fines and/or criminal action was taken against the person (s) responsible for the fire.

If people knew the repercussions of their actions, and if action was actually taken against them, it may make a big difference.

1/24/2008

Heisel, Leanne

From: Judy van Aswegen [judy@firebreak.co.za]
Sent: Thursday, January 24, 2008 5:01 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Input sought on state wildfire management

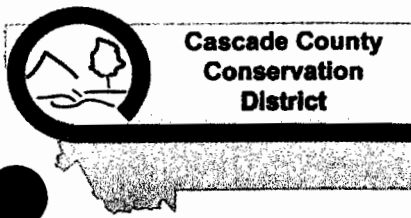
Leanne Heisel,

This unique equipment for burning black lines safely and efficiently to create more effective fire breaks is now being tested and documented by the FWS in Huron, South Dakota: <http://www.firebreak.co.za/NA/index.htm>.



Regards,

Judy van Aswegen
Firebreak Equipment
604.274-0234
www.firebreak.co.za



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www.cascadecd.org

January 25, 2008

Fire Suppression Committee
c/o Leanne Heisel
Legislative Service Division
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Senator Cobb and members of the Fire Suppression Committee:

The Cascade County Conservation District submits the following comments regarding firefighting operations in Montana:

- The District supports the resolution recently passed by the Montana Association of Conservation Districts urging "the Forest Service, Congress, and the President of the United States to consider a revised policy which includes immediate suppression of fires in a watershed drainage in drought years." A copy of the resolution is attached for your reference. Because of ongoing drought situations, it is imperative to take immediate action to control fires. Without an initial attack, the fires become so large and intense that they are almost impossible to control.
- Private property needs to be protected from burning during a fire and from the physical and economic impacts incurred after the fire. If volunteer fire departments and/or private individuals are trying to suppress the fire, federal agencies should allow them to continue.
- Some of the monetary resources used to suppress fires may be better utilized for fuel reduction and timber thinning in forests.
- With the intensity of fires increasing, it takes more resources (money, manpower, supplies) to control fires. Intense fires also destroy the integrity and composition of top soil and limits re-growth. With hotter and larger fires, there is also a safety issue for fire fighters.
- Private property owners and developers of real estate in the forest interface need to understand the importance of a safe zone around structures. They also need to be aware of the importance of an access road that allows both access to the site for fire and emergency vehicles and that will provide an escape route for inhabitants.
- Large fires increase the release of carbon dioxide and particulates into the atmosphere which affects air quality and has an impact on increased global warming.

Thank you for your time and attention on this matter. We sincerely hope that your efforts will result in more efficient management of the state's firefighting resources and greater protection of our natural resources. If you have any questions or concerns regarding our comments, please contact our acting administrator at (406) 727-3603, extension 140. Thank you.

Sincerely,

John Chase
CCD Treasurer

WILDFIRE FEEDBACK

Study Item: State and federal forest management policies and how those policies may contribute to an increased number of wildfires, greater safety risk to firefighters, or compromised effectiveness of fire suppression efforts.

The specific recommendation I have is: **PUT THE FIRES OUT IMMEDIATELY!!!**

Allow me to explain in greater detail. There is tremendous discussion about the higher fuel load in the forests; especially National Forests, as a result of current management or should I say mismanagement of forest lands. This fuel load increase is due to such factors as beetle kill, no thinning of new growth, reduced logging on federal and state lands, and of course drying weather patterns (you know - global warming). The bottom line is that none of these factors has any bearing on wildfires until they become large. If the fires were fought aggressively at their inception (they don't occur as full blown, out of control, fires; they start small and grow at a rate that is dependent upon temperature, wind, and type and quantity of available fuel) they could be controlled while minimizing expense and the associated losses.

What we need is a fast response policy that states that we will not wait and watch any fire, but that we will quickly and aggressively fight fires as soon as discovered with the closest and best resources available. (Whenever possible the fires could be fought at night when temperatures are lower and wind is less prevalent) It then becomes a matter of preparing and strategically locating fast response crews around the state (utilize local people and resources when available). The best equipment to contain fires on a small scale and in varying types of terrain needs to be identified and assembled well in advance of the fire season. **The personnel that oversee the operation of such equipment need to be trained and given latitude and authority to exercise judgment to best enforce that policy.**

There is nothing more frustrating than observing a fire camp that has been set up by the Forest Service and seeing huge amounts of personnel and equipment sitting while our forests burn out of control. If we wait to fight the fire until the federal government can assemble its team of experts and organize its associated bureaucracy we will be watching our prized resources go up in smoke every summer into the foreseeable future.

Forest fires don't just cost us in the loss of that resource but it costs us in quality of life as well – I for one don't enjoy my summers when I can't see the mountains, much less go into them to recreate. Last year it was hazardous to your health to even go outside in many of our communities. Some communities had to be evacuated which places people under tremendous stress. If I were a tourist it would only take one experience visiting Montana during a fire season like the one we have endured the last two years to sour me forever on Big Sky Country (a sky you couldn't see most of the time)

So let me reiterate my position:

PUT THE FIRES OUT IMMEDIATELY!!!!!!

Sincerely,
Charles Parke
Parke Logging Inc.

Heisel, Leanne

From: Storymjsjc@aol.com
Sent: Friday, January 25, 2008 10:34 AM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Response to Request for Comment by Fire Suppression Committee Members
Attachments: Recommendations for Fire Suppression in Montana.wps

Dear Leanne:

Attached is my comments regarding the "Request for Comments" letter delivered to me.

I am frustrated by the fact that there are just too many issues which affect so many people in fire.

I offer a few suggestions which I feel would be a good start for your committee.

I will make myself available to you should you require any additional information or comment.

Sincerely,

Mark Story / Chief
Bighorn Fire Company Inc.
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Who's never won? Biggest Grammy Award surprises of all time on AOL Music.

Southwest Montana Zone Fire Prevention Committee
Member Agencies:

Montana DNRC
Southwestern Land Office

U.S. Forest Service
Lolo National Forest

U.S. Forest Service
Bitterroot National Forest

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Flathead Agency

Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Lee Metcalf Refuge and National Bison Range

January 25, 2008

Comments for Fire Suppression Interim Committee

Dear Committee:

On behalf of the Southwest Montana Zone Fire Prevention Committee I am writing in response to your request for comments. We, as a committee, met recently, and have several suggestions for you.

Let me begin by stating a clear and obvious fact: The least expensive fire to fight is the one that never starts. Fire prevention should be the first and foremost thought when thinking about wildland fires. Historically however, suppression has been the main focus and response to wildland fire.

The Southwestern Land Office of Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation is observing an increasing trend. In the past three years the percentage of human-caused fires compared to lightning fires rose to 72%. People have started almost three quarters of all fire starts in this region. In the past, this number typically hovered at 50%.

This 72% human-caused ratio has another important component. While the number of human-caused fires slightly increased, the number of lightning fires significantly decreased. Since 2003, the Southwestern Land Office noticed a large drop in the number of lightning fires. For whatever reason, such as change in weather patterns, climate change, etc., the lightning-caused fires in the area have recently been well below average.

The Southwestern Land Office also experienced a record year in 2007 with the amount of fire responses. With the strain on available resources being what it is, imagine if the number of lightning fires had been what they normally are. This scenario could be a very threatening circumstance.

Consider that most human-caused fires ignite near the wildland-urban interface. These fires are vastly more expensive to manage. For example, the Conger Creek Fire 2007 which burned in and near wilderness with no homes at risk cost about \$40 per acre compared to the Jocko Lakes Fire 2007 which threatened the community of Seeley Lake and cost approximately \$1000 per acre to fight. The difference in cost lies in the increasing complexity as people, evacuations, and structure protection become priorities. As more timberlands become real estate, our wildland-urban interface is increasing dramatically. Subdivisions are established without regard to the real threat of future wildfire. As development increases, so does the wildland-urban interface; this will cause the cost of firefighting to rise dramatically in future years as the values at risk continue to grow.

Fire prevention and education programs need to be funded across the state of Montana through the Forest Service, BLM, DNRC and Tribal jurisdictions. Several National Forests and DNRC offices across the state do not have dedicated prevention technicians.

While we cannot control climatic conditions or how many lightning caused fires occur over the area, we can attempt to control the human-caused ones. Here are some possible solutions:

- Bring fire prevention to the forefront of all wildland fire discussions.

- Currently, Montana seeks reimbursement for costs associated with suppressing a fire from those individuals found accountable for igniting the fire. This money goes into the state's general fund. Instead, create a funding mechanism whereby this money would go to fire prevention and mitigation efforts.

- As fire danger rises, planning levels increase to bring on more fire suppression resources. Prevention resources should also ramp up as fire danger increases.

If no changes in practice are made in this state with regard to firefighting, prevention and suppression, Montana communities are at great risk. More homes will burn; possibly even an entire community will be destroyed by wildfire. Lives of civilians and firefighters alike will be lost.

On behalf of the Montana Southwest Zone Fire Prevention Committee, I hope that these comments are helpful to you as you look for ways to help increase the effectiveness of allocating funds to firefighting operations. We feel it is imperative to increase funding for fire prevention as development and the wildland-urban interface increase.

Sincerely,



Allison Kolbe

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